Composition

the SCARED and LONELY WRITERS' ZINE

by Liz Vidulich

volume 1.1 / spring 2025

NORCOM

Tools For Knowledge

WHAT THE HECK IS A ZINE?

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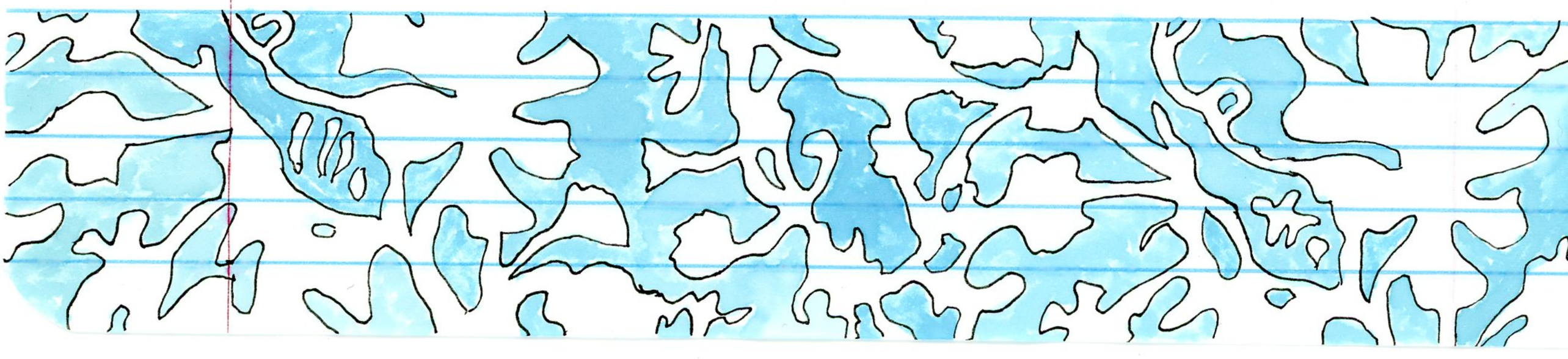
Rediscovering FanFiction

or: how I learned to stop worrying and love the creative process

WELCOME!

Thanks for picking up the first issue of the SCARED and LONELY WRITERS' ZINE, a personal quarterly by Liz Vidulich (me!). After a lifetime of dedicated journaling, I started writing fiction in late 2021 and queried agents for representation last year. My novel is currently on submission to editors, which means I'm closer than ever to securing a book deal but have absolutely no guarantees that it'll happen.

I have a lot of Thoughts and Feelings on pursuing a creative life. Writing is isolating. Publishing is a rat race. There's so much noise around what's "good" — literary merit, commercial viability, resonance with this or that group of readers — that it sometimes feels impossible to listen to your own sensibilities. But I got into this because it brought me joy, and I want it to continue bringing me joy no matter what happens with my career as an author. This zine is a space for me to come back to what's at the heart of my urge to create.



Each issue of SLW2 ("slooze") explores the craft of writing, the publishing industry, and the upkeep of a healthy creative life (check out Rediscovering Fanfiction for a little or all three!). I also include a topical piece or two (see Zines 101, an introduction to the medium for anyone who's confused about what this is) as well as some recurring features (Media Roundup— what I've been into lately— and Back in the Day, in which I unearth my cringiest journal entries for your entertainment).

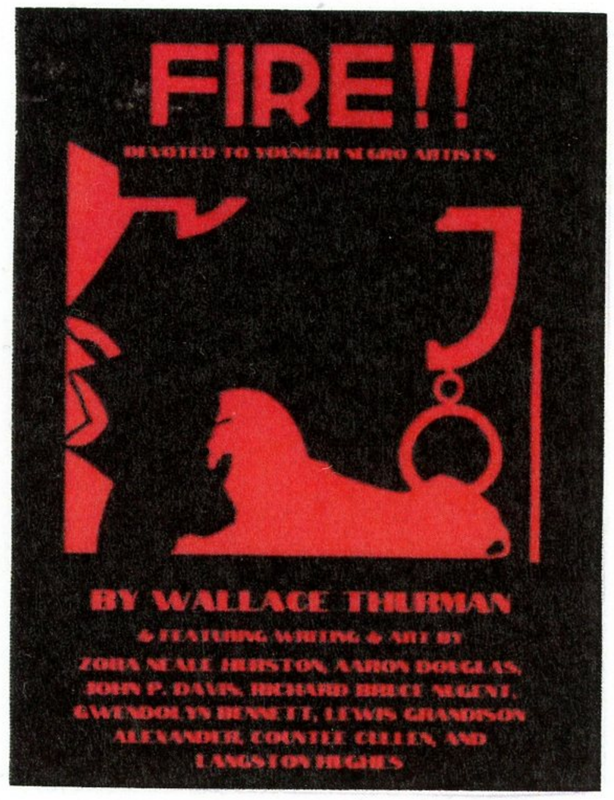
Am I really scared and lonely? Always! Just kidding. The title of this zine comes from my mishearing a line in Bruce Springsteen's "Born to Run," in which the narrator pleads that he's a scared and lonely RIDER. I, sad suburban Jersey girl furiously scribbling the lyrics into my journal, naturally heard WRITER and have never managed to unhear it.

Plus, like... aren't we all?

♡ Liz

ZINES 101

A zine is a self-published, self-circulated booklet of whatever the hell the author feels like putting in 8-16 pages. You can think of them as the DIY precursor to the blog: a space for self-expression with the intent to distribute.


FIRE!!
DEVOTED TO YOUNGER NEGRO ARTISTS
BY WALLACE THURMAN
& FEATURING WRITING & ART BY
ZORA NEALE HURSTON, AARON DOUGLAS,
JOHN P. DAVIS, RICHARD BRUCE NUGENT,
GWENDOLYN BENNETT, LEWIS GRANDISON
ALEXANDER, COUNTEE CULLEN, AND
LANGSTON HUGHES

Fire!! A Quarterly Devoted to Younger Negro Artists (1926) was a short-lived (single issue) zine created by a constellation of Harlem Renaissance artists and intellectuals, including Zora Neale Hurston, Countee Cullen, and Langston Hughes. Hughes described the zine as aiming to "burn up... the old, dead conventional Negro-white ideas of the past... into a realization of the existence of the younger Negro writers and artists, and provide us with an outlet for publication not available in the limited pages of the small Negro magazines then existing."

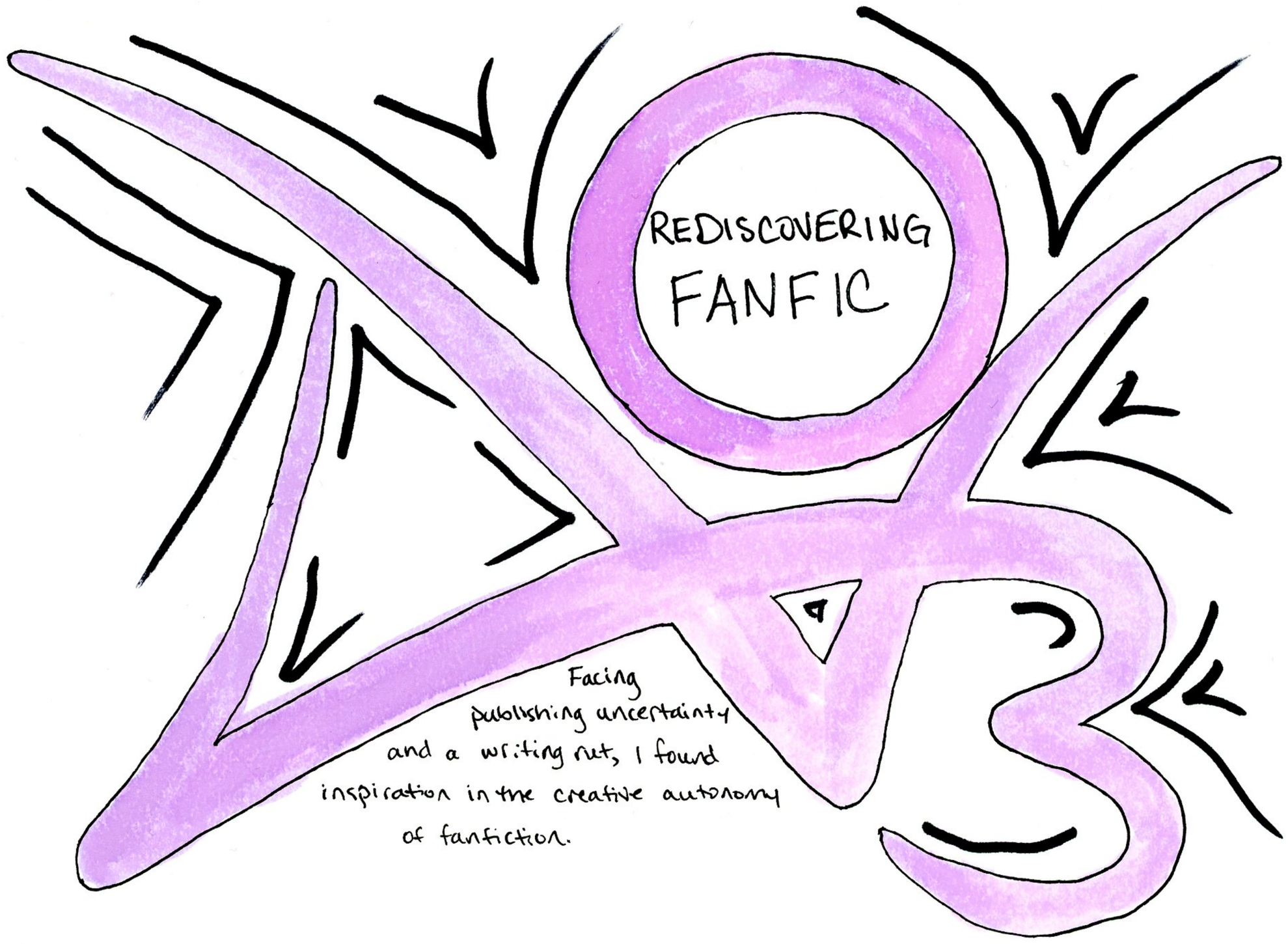
Sniffin' Glue... + Other Rock'n'Roll Habits for Punks! chronicled the South London punk scene for 12 issues in the late 70s. In a most punk rock move, the founder ceased operations when circulation exploded and the zine risked becoming mainstream, encouraging his readers to instead create their own zines.

The phenomenon of sharing thoughts and opinions using independent methods can be traced back centuries—think 'Common Sense' by Thomas Paine—but gained traction in the 20th century within subcultures whose perspective found no footing in traditional publishing. Zines cover themes and topics like politics, art of all kinds, cultural criticism, and more.

Spockanalia, a zine for Star Trek enthusiasts, is considered the first media fanzine, debuting in 1967. Cast members of the show, including Leonard Nimoy (Spock), DeForest Kelley (Bones), and James Doohan (Scotty), contributed to later issues by writing letters to the editor "from" their characters.

When conventional media outlets failed to meaningfully engage with issues affecting women, third-wave feminists of the 90s used zines to platform women's experiences. The second issue of Bikini Kill, founded by Bikini Kill frontwoman Kathleen Hanna, featured a piece called the Riot Grrrl Manifesto, outlining the necessity of protected creative spaces for women.

THE SCARED AND LONELY WRITERS' ZINE covers writing, publishing, and finding a fulfilling creative life. In the past I've explored these topics online, but everything I touch on the internet benefits billionaires and/or is terrible for my brain. Lame! That said, as an early-career novelist hoping for commercial success, I need a way to connect with my audience. A zine isn't the scale or medium publishers have in mind when they talk about an author platform, but... here's hoping to an "A" for effort. ❀



My agent and I went on submission to editors with my first novel this winter. Submission is the harrowing process in which an author's precious wee manuscript is evaluated by editors like a beagle at the Westminster Dog Show. All the beagles that make it to Westminster meet the standards for the breed (genre), so success comes down to what speaks to the judges (editors). Instead of showing the pup herself, the author has a handler (her agent) take the manuscript/dog out on the floor, but unlike the dog show, the owner/writer doesn't sit in the audience. Instead she obsessively checks her email to see if the agent/handler has gotten in touch to say Miss Molly advanced to Best in Show (an editor wants to talk) or was eliminated (all editors passed on the manuscript).

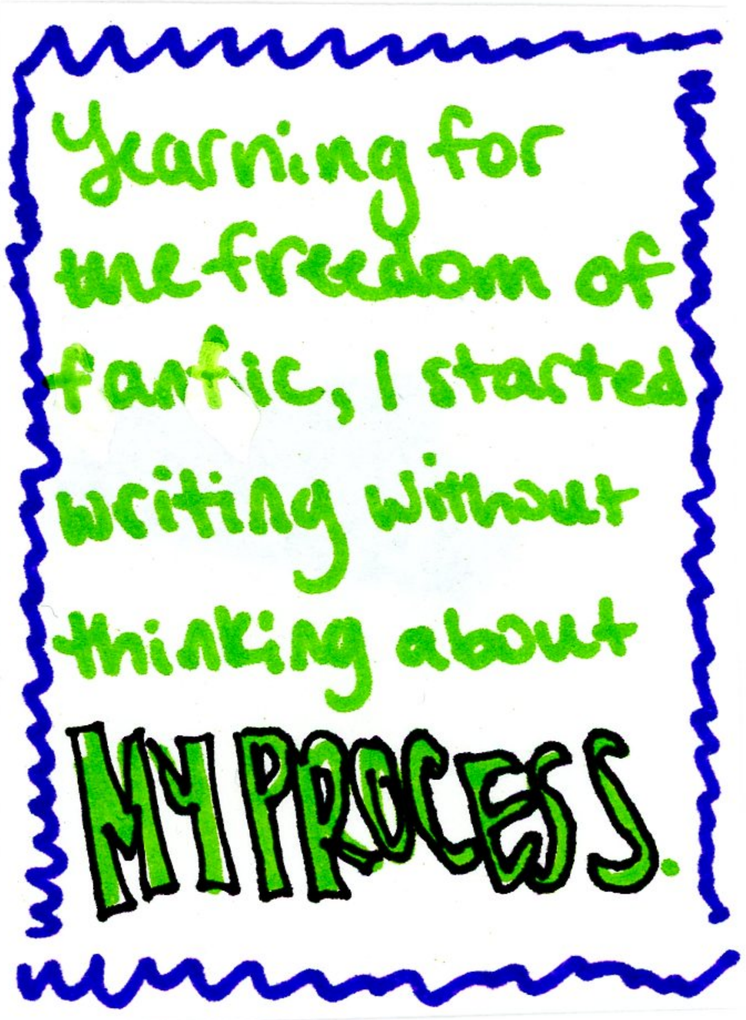
In an effort to think about anything other than traditional publishing, I took a nostalgic vacation to the world of fanfiction. I reread some old favorites, found some new ones, and felt, for the first time in decades, the urge to write one.

At the same time I was processing 2024, a real doozy of a year that left me overwhelmed in my life and as a writer. I'll give myself a break on the life stuff, but on the writing side, much of it was self-imposed pressure to meet the expectations of a career author who publishes a book per year. Given that I am several complete novels and as many book deals away from that being a possibility, it's ridiculous to have felt like a failure for not matching them—but I did.

There's freedom in fanfic—it's anonymous and there's no market to consider, and the comments and kudos features on AO3 mean the dopamine is aflowing as soon as you post. Tropes are encouraged and people will happily read dozens of the same ones with the same characters, so you can tell the paralyzing voice bugging you about originality to go straight to hell.

Yearning for that freedom, I opened a fresh doc and started typing without even thinking about My Process.

I developed My Process after reading Matt Bell's <u>Refuse to Be Done</u>: exploratory first draft, re<u>WRITE</u> when moving onto the second, and only after the full rewrite moving onto revision. It worked like magic for the book currently on submission — I went from a vague idea to the manuscript I queried with in a little over a year. But!! Since then I've started and abandoned FOUR different projects.



So: fuck my process. At least for now, at least for fanfic.

I puked out scene snippets and bits of conversation as they came to me and left them at the bottom of my document until I was ready to revisit them. I edited as I went, revising scenes little by little, and watched them progress from bare sketches to rich captured moments.

I interrogated the urge to just finish. There often comes a point in a writing project when I wish wish wish I could be done. Hard work disappearing in the rearview, nothing left to do but read and be proud of the perfect, inevitably NYT-bestselling version of the story that exists in my head.

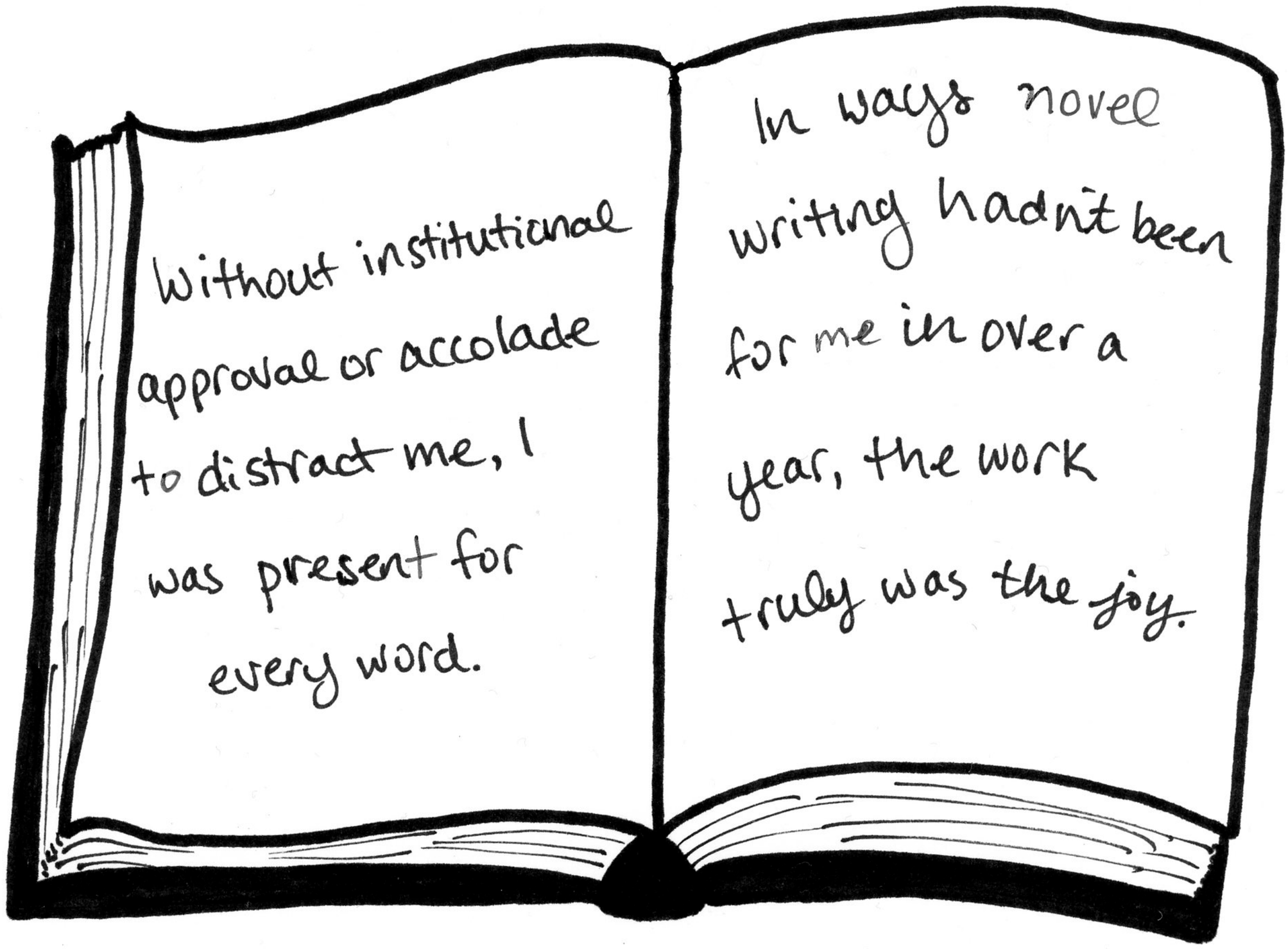
But finishing is not the point of art. Instead of powering through, I took breaks. Recharged my creative batteries and avoided obsessing over how I would get to that mythical perfect version. I consumed art openly without pressuring myself to engage with media for the purpose of finding inspiration.

Without the prospect of three or more major revisions, I sat with the story and the characters differently. Often as writers we're told to turn off our editing brains, but keeping my editing hat on kept me from being lazy about particulars or procrasting the hard parts. There was no "fix it in post", which meant I held nothing back in what was essentially a first draft. Is this really how that character feels? Am I getting at the heart of the conflict or just scratching the surface? Why is this asshole shrugging so much?

After two weeks, I ended with a clean, well-paced 20,000 word story. I did a little tidying (seriously, no single character should shrug 22 times in fewer than a hundred pages), took a day, and then posted to AO3.

> finishing a piece is not the point of art

Not to brag (or kid myself that anyone cares), but I did get an affirming and warm-fuzzy response. It is truly special to connect so personally and immediately with your audience, to hear that your writing and story resonates with someone, to know you've rendered them wordless when a comment consists of simply a keyboard smash and a dozen emojis.


Without institutional approval or accolade to distract me, I was present for every word.
In ways novel writing hadn't been for me in over a year, the work truly was the joy.

More importantly, though: I enjoyed the process from start to finish. Or, if enjoy is too strong a word to describe how I felt scavenging my brain for alternative action beats, I at least felt energized around the characters and story and prose as opposed to stewing over what the finished product could mean for me and my ego. Without institutional approval or accolade to distract me, I was present for every word. In ways novel writing hadn't been for me in over a year, the work truly was the joy.

A 20,000-word fanfic isn't a 90,000 word novel. A messy manuscript peppered with half-formed scenes is much harder to wrangle at 400 pages than 85. The novel I've started since my fanfiction adventure will certainly require more than 1.5 drafts, and I can't put things like market viability and genre conventions entirely out of my head if I want it to sell one day.

But! I <u>can</u> be less constrained by these facets of traditional publishing. Less concerned with shoehorning expectations in early in the name of efficiency and then getting discouraged when my exciting story becomes bogged down and generic. I can be flexible with how I approach a new writing project, recognize that I'm still green as a novelist and will face creative hurdles throughout my career. I can acknowledge that I don't need to be a high-volume author who releases THE book of the summer, every summer. I can focus my energy and attention on honoring my characters' story and telling it in the most authentic and compelling way. I can remember that even if Miss Molly never wins a single ribbon, training her and bonding with her and enjoying her company was worth my effort a million times over.

ALL KI

NOI

LLER

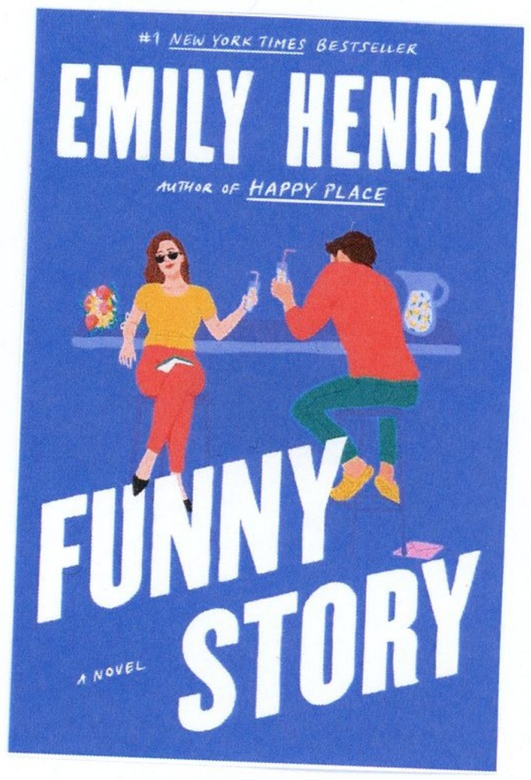
FIL

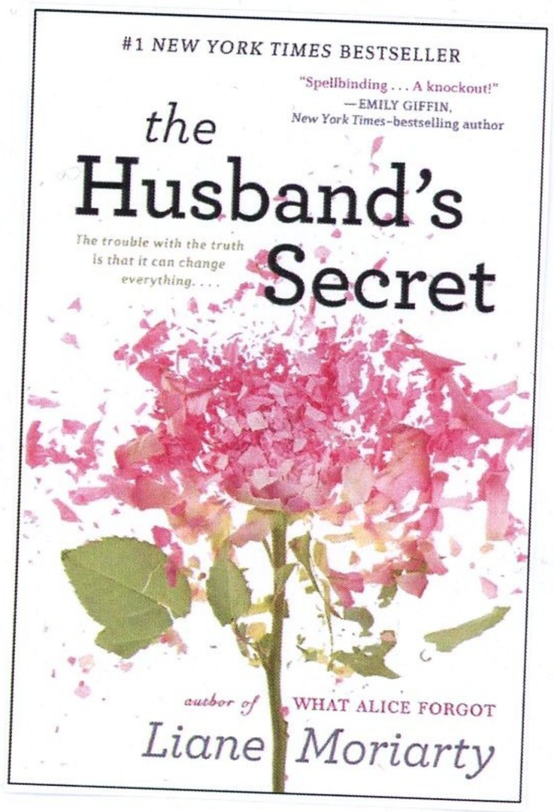
LER*

*except this page b/c formatting is a bitch!

books : book roundup : media

Finally past the intense professional and artistic envy that made it impossible for me to read Emily Henry's books over the past two years, which is great for me because I was able to enjoy this tender, sharp, and, yes— funny— love story.

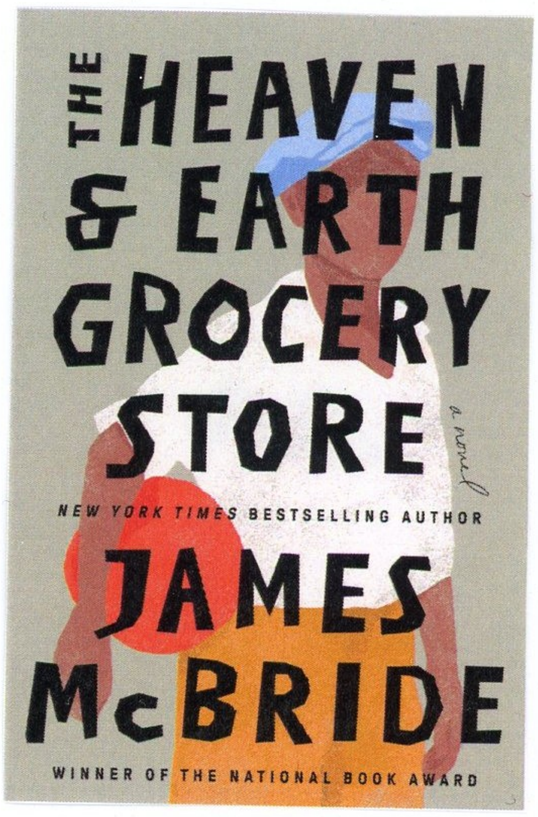


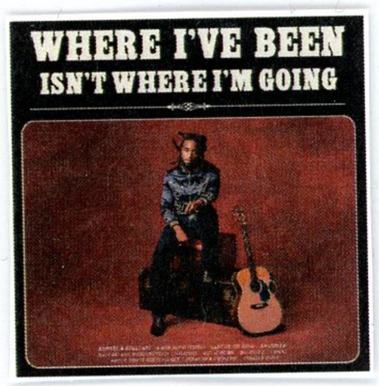

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER
"Spellbinding . . . A knockout!"
—EMILY GIFFIN,
New York Times–bestselling author
the Husband's Secret
The trouble with the truth is that it can change everything. . . .
author of WHAT ALICE FORGOT
Liane Moriarty

Like all Liane Moriarty books, there came a point where I was convinced she couldn't land the plane.

Like all Liane Moriarty books, I was wrong.

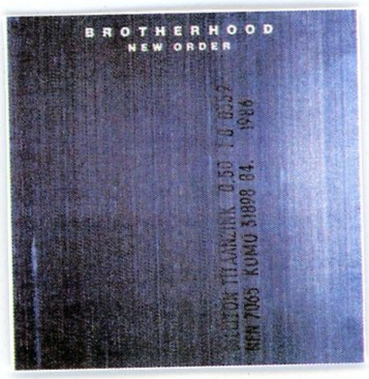
Life-affirming and bursting at the seams with love. A beautiful story, masterfully told.

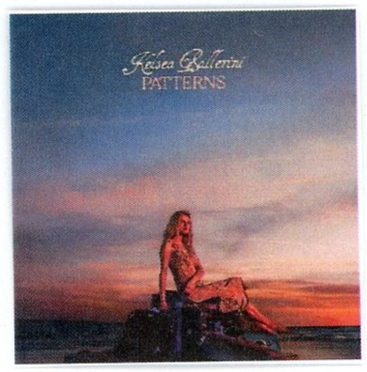

THE HEAVEN & EARTH GROCERY STORE
a novel
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR
JAMES McBRIDE
WINNER OF THE NATIONAL BOOK AWARD



Where I'm Going Isn't Where I've Been (2024) Shaboozey

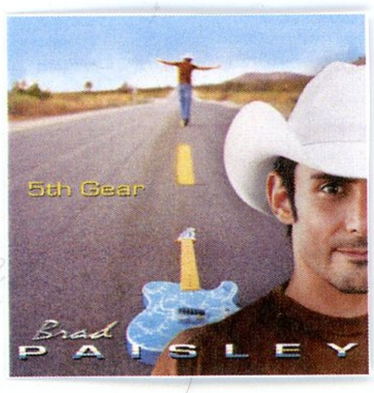
Brotherhood (1986) New Order



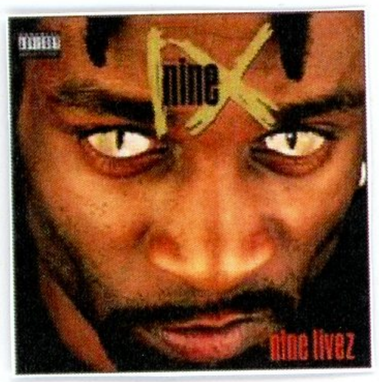


Patterns (2024) Kelsea Ballerini

[ALBUMS]



5th Gear (2007) Brad Paisley



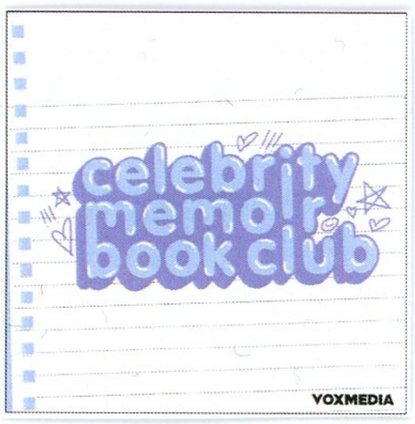
Nine Livez (1995) Nine

hellocorrello

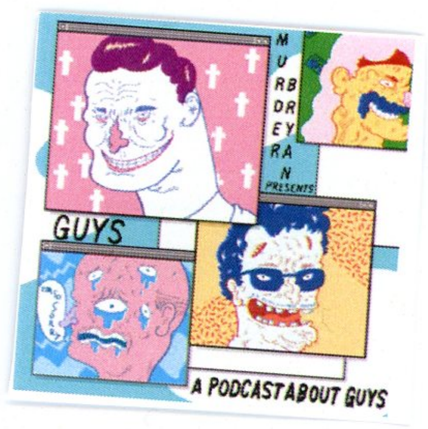
ROMANCE, RAMBLINGS, AND R...MORE

Im sorry to say that I hate Substack and author newsletters, but I have one exception: Hello Corrello by Betty Corrello. Corrello says fuck you to writing "tips" and useless promotion, and instead comes up with wonderfully insightful and hilarious essays that by cosmic coincidence (/her skill at arcing in the reader) always feel relevant.

[PODCASTS]



Celebrity Memoir Book Club



GUYS with Bryan Quimby

I've been journaling since I could hold a pencil, and though I've lost or destroyed about half of my diaries, I still have a few dozen from middle school through college. To be vulnerable (ew): I am very, very embarrassed anytime I revisit one. Documenting my life so thoroughly has robbed me of the delusion that I was ever cool. Say a prayer for my dignity and consider this an invitation to laugh at me, with me.

The days: BACK IN

Tuesday, 18 July, 2006

Nana's bedroom.

5:02pm - Here's a fun fact (or a lot, rather).

1. I like lists + schedules but rarely follow them.
2. I'm 15 + I watch Disney Channel original movies religiously. I also love "Fairly Odd Parents" + "Hey Arnold!"
3. I listen to Shawtures + emo + really corny '80's music (e.g. Journey).
4. I always make really out there monetary goals + never reach them (Christine, however, I will get the skinny grey Alloy jeans!).
5. When I'm at my nana's house, as in now, I read her corny erotica-esque romance novels. They're not as steamy as I'd hoped, but the stories can be addictive.
6. Top 5 things I do on a computer
   1. check my myspace
   2. myspace stalk people
   3. read Harry Potter fan fiction
   4. fantasize about how pretty I'd be if I could afford make-up from Sephora
   5. check for updates about new H.P. movie/books
7. I'm a capricorn + I love horoscope basher.

In honor of the first issue of SLW2, here's the intro to the journal I started the summer I was fifteen.

Some things never change...

MAD LIBZ*

An Afternoon at the Vineyard

We spent a _____ afternoon at the
adjective

_____ _____ Vineyard on the
adjective noun

North _____ of Long Island. The view
kitchen utensil

was _____ and _____ _____
adjective number adjective

_____ roamed the garden.
animal (plural)

The wine was _____, _____ and so
adjective adjective

_____ that _____ _____ on
adjective person in room verb (past tense)

the table. The bartender _____ asked us
adverb

to _____ the premises immediately or
verb

she'd have to _____ us herself.
verb

On the way out, _____ stole _____
other person in room number

_____ _____ from the tasting room
color noun (plural)

gift shop, but in a fit of conscience returned
them to the owner with _____ apologies.
adjective

She forgave us all, merely saying,

"_____!" before giving us all
cliche or platitude

_____, _____, and _____. I
food food noun (plural)

can't wait for our next visit! ❀

* Mad Libs by Liz ☺

Look for Volume 2 in June, featuring beach read recommendations, a feature on my artist residency in France, and more! ✿